



CPSU (PSU Group) Submission:

Senate inquiry into improvement in animal welfare for Australian live exports

Scope

The Rural Affairs and Transport Committee is undertaking a broad inquiry into improvement in animal welfare for Australian live exports. This CPSU submission does not address all of the terms of reference but is limited to those aspects of the Inquiry relevant to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

Introduction

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) represents workers in the Australian Public Service (APS), Commonwealth Government statutory agencies, the ACT Public Service, the Northern Territory Public Service, Telstra, the telecommunications sector, call centres, employment services and broadcasting including ABC and SBS.

As the principal union covering staff in the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS), CPSU and its members have considerable knowledge and experience of AQIS operations. The preparation of this CPSU submission has been guided by the experience and expertise of CPSU members working in Meat Inspection and Veterinarian roles in AQIS.

Recommendations

1. Exports of livestock for slaughter should be phased out.
2. Until live exports are phased out, all live animal transportation should be under the supervision of AQIS employees.
3. The CPSU calls on the Federal Government to support the processing of meat to remain in Australia.
4. All export meat production should be monitored by AQIS employed Meat Inspectors and Veterinarians.
5. The CPSU supports the Inquiry into animal welfare concerns but calls on the committee to give to give serious consideration to issues involving the viability and economic consequences of the live export trade, including the implication for Australian Jobs in the meat processing sector.
6. As an alternative to the Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership which aims to improve abattoir practices in Indonesia and other countries, Australia should look at options to form partnerships to develop infrastructure in Australia's live export countries that would enable those countries to receive more pre-packaged meat from Australia.

Background

The CPSU has many members working in the Australian meat export industry and feedback since the practice of live animal exports was introduced has been consistent - once livestock leaves Australian supervised care there is potential for animal mistreatment.

The CPSU has consulted with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) on meat inspection issues and continues to advocate the importance of Australia's export meat processing Industry, overseen by a strong independent public sector inspection service. This submission builds on previous CPSU submissions to this Committee in relation to meat inspection issues.

Standards for Animal Slaughter

AQIS employs registered Veterinarians and Meat Inspectors who monitor and assess the treatment of animals and standards of hygiene for all meat exports. This includes both livestock that are exported for slaughter as well as animals that are slaughtered and processed in Australia for export.

Australia has strict standards for the humane and hygienic production and transportation of meat for human consumption. These are set out in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals at Slaughtering Establishments* (SCARM Report 79) and the *Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption* (SCARM Report 80). The latter includes as an outcome 'the minimization of risk of injury, pain and suffering and the least practical disturbance to animals'¹.

These Codes of Practice contain detailed standards for the unloading and holding of animals as well as slaughter techniques and stunning methods. In Australia, animals must be stunned to ensure that they are unconscious and insensible to pain before they are killed²

These guidelines extend to ritual slaughter such as in the production of Halal meat. In this case the Codes of Practice stipulate that if an animal is not rendered unconscious as part of the ritual slaughter, it must be immediately stunned.³

There are also various additional requirements of Australian export abattoirs. One important requirement is that each export abattoir must have an on-plant veterinarian who is required to be registered by the relevant state veterinary surgeons board. Each state has its own animal welfare legislation and the

¹ SCARM Report 79, *Australian meat exports – maintenance of inspection standards in Australia: Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments*, 2001, CSIRO Publishing; SCARM Report 80, *Australian Standards for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption*, 2002, CSIRO publishing.

² Ibid, Standard 7.10

³ Ibid, Standard 7.12(2)

registered veterinarians must enforce these standards or risk deregistration, resulting in the loss of their job. On-plant veterinarians have scheduled verification activities focused on animal welfare.

The countries to which Australia exports live animals for slaughter are not legally bound to enforce Australian standards. If these countries do not have equivalent standards and enforcement regimes, there is the potential for mistreatment of livestock once exported to these countries for slaughter. These are the same animals whose welfare Australian standards aim to protect.

This is not only concerning from an animal welfare point of view but it also undermines the standards that we have in Australia and the work done by Australian government veterinarians and meat inspectors to provide a humane and hygienic meat industry.

Live Animal Transportation

The potential for mistreatment of livestock in foreign abattoirs is not the only troublesome aspect of live animal exports. The transportation of animals on long overseas voyages is also an inhumane practice.

The Cormo Express disaster of 2003 shocked the Australian community when 5600 of 50,000 sheep died in transit after a shipment was rejected by Saudi Arabian officials over alleged disease concerns. This disaster brought to light the inhumane conditions that livestock are subjected to on long sea voyages and it undermined community confidence in the live export trade.

Even with *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock* which were developed in response to this, there is still an unacceptable mortality rate during live export voyages. 1,192 heads of cattle and 18,625 heads of sheep died during live export voyages in 2010⁴. In addition to this, there are further deaths when unloading cattle from ships. The likelihood of increased livestock deaths is increased the longer the sea voyage. Australian exports to the Middle East and Turkey can involve voyages of over a month in duration.

Until the practice of live exports is phased out, all live animal transportation should be under the supervision of AQIS employees. This would ensure that rigorous and independent government inspection standards are upheld. It would also ensure that the overseeing employees have the protections of the *Public Service Act 1999*, including whistleblower protections.

⁴ Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Livestock mortalities for exports by sea, <http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/export-trade/mortalities>

Australian Jobs

Live exports began to grow in the 1980s, and since then many Australian abattoirs have been forced to close down. This has been partly due to a lack of cattle to process in Australian abattoirs because many farmers prefer to export live cattle for overseas slaughter. The changes in the industry have caused the losses of tens of thousands of jobs, mostly in regional areas where the abattoirs were located. In many cases the abattoirs were the primary source of employment in regional towns.

A ban on live exports has the potential to re-enliven Australia's meat processing industry and bring back to regional towns, many of the jobs that have been lost.

The current media attention on live exports suggests that a significant proportion of work in the meat export sector involves the export of live animals. However, the overwhelming majority of Australia's meat exports comprise chilled packed meat that is slaughtered in Australia.

Australia could more vigorously market packaged, chilled meat that is processed locally to expand this market in lieu of live animal exports. This would provide more jobs for Australians and if done in conjunction with the maintenance of Government controlled meat inspection, it would ensure that Australia's high standards of animal welfare and hygienic meat production are applied to all export meat and all Australian cattle are treated humanely in the slaughtering process.

Recommendations

- Exports of livestock for slaughter should be phased out.
- Until such exports are phased out, all live animal transportation should be under the supervision of AQIS employees.
- The CPSU calls on the Federal Government to support the processing of meat to remain in Australia.
- The CPSU supports the Inquiry into animal welfare concerns but calls on the committee to give to give serious consideration to issues involving the viability and economic consequences of the live export trade, including the implication for Australian Jobs in the meat processing sector.

Importance of Government oversight in meat production

In previous submissions to this Committee regarding the introduction of a new meat inspection service, the CPSU has highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong independent public sector meat inspection service to ensure high standards of meat production. The CPSU has also raised concerns that these standards can be compromised when the industry is left to self-regulate.

The CPSU and its members have long been resisting proposed changes to the meat inspection system that would give the industry more control of

inspection/regulation. In the 2009 CPSU submission to the Inquiry into the Removal of Rebate for AQIS Export Certification Functions, the CPSU stressed the importance of maintaining a rigorous and independent inspection system. The submission stated:

“What those in industry who are pushing for changes really want is not the monetary saving but control over the inspection/ regulation function. In some cases it is because they have trouble meeting the regulatory/ food safety/ market access requirements.”⁵

The inhumane practices in Indonesian abattoirs that have recently been the focus of intense media coverage are evidence of how standards can be compromised and animal welfare overlooked when the monitoring of meat production and inspection standards is left in the hands of the industry. Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) admitted that they have been aware of the substandard conditions in Indonesian abattoirs some time yet continued to export livestock to Indonesia for slaughter and supply Indonesian abattoirs with mark 1 restraining boxes⁶.

The recent evidence about the known poor practices in Indonesian Abattoirs should be a timely warning against any departure from Australia’s independent inspection system to a system which would allow the Australian meat industry to have more control over the inspection/regulation of Australian Export Meat.

Australian meat exports – maintenance of inspection standards in Australia

It has been argued that Australia’s current export markets, particularly Indonesia, cannot accept increased quantities of packaged meat. It is claimed that the lack of refrigeration facilities in these countries prevents the transportation and storage of the meat and necessitates the importation of live animals. There have also been arguments that meat exports cannot fully replace the live trade because some parts of the animal, such as offal, which are used in Indonesia, cannot be refrigerated and transported.

This is not correct. Refrigerated, processed meat and meat products, including Halal meats, are routinely sent to Indonesia. In 2009/10, Australia’s processed meat exports to Indonesia were worth \$207 Million⁷. Animals that are slaughtered for this market are handled in an identical manner to all other animals slaughtered in Australian abattoirs, in compliance with all relevant Australian legislation and standards.

⁵ Community and Public Sector Union, *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Inquiry into the Removal of Rebate for AQIS Export Certification Functions*, 2009

⁶ Lateline, 8 June 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2011/s3239281.htm>

⁷ Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, *Australian Food Statistics 2009–10*, Commonwealth of Australia 2011

Australia's live export markets in the Middle East and Indonesia currently have sufficient refrigeration facilities to accept large quantities of packaged meat that has been processed in Australia. If any additional infrastructure is required, the Australian Government should look into potential development partnerships that could help provide this (see below).

Another important factor in maintaining access to meat export markets is the maintenance of Australia's standards of inspection and verification arrangements that meet the requirements of importing countries. To ensure that Australian export meat continues to meet the standards acceptable by overseas importers it is important that inspection remains in the hand of AQIS meat inspectors.

At a time when Australia should move to rely more heavily on the exports of Australian processed meat, it is particularly important that the industry is not placed at risk by moving away from the current effective inspection system that provides oversight by independent government inspectors.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All export meat productions should be monitored by AQIS employed Meat Inspectors and Veterinarians.

Development Assistance

Some groups have claimed that improvements to animal welfare should be an issue to be solved through foreign aid rather than something to be addressed through the market. The CPSU disagrees. Not only is profiting from the inhumane treatment of animals unethical, but previous efforts to improve abattoir practices in Indonesia through Australian government assistance have not worked.

A Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership was established as part of the 2009/10 Federal Budget replacing the previous International Agriculture Cooperation — Live Animal Trade Program⁸. These programs involved joint funding by the Australian government and Industry to improve animal welfare in Australia's live exports. One of the projects of these programs involved improving abattoir practices in Indonesia.

Both the *4 Corners* report and an earlier report prepared for Livecorp and Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) in May 2010, made available by the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, highlighted the ongoing deficiencies in the slaughter process in Indonesia⁹. On this basis it would seem that efforts to improve overseas practices through Australian government funding have not been effective.

⁸ 2009/10 Federal Budget, Budget Paper 2, p86; 2008/9 Federal Budget, Budget Paper 2...

⁹ *4 Corners, A Bloody Business*, 30 May 2011; Independent study into animal welfare conditions for cattle in Indonesia from point of arrival from Australia to slaughter, May 2010

The only way to ensure meat is processed in a humane and hygienic manner is if it is processed in Australia and subject to regulation and inspection according to Australian standards.

The CPSU considers that a better use of Government resources would be to replace Australia's foreign animal welfare assistance programs with investment in the development of a partnership program that could help build infrastructure and refrigeration facilities in Australia's live export countries, including Indonesia. This would run in parallel with the phasing out of live exports and would enable these countries to be able to accept more packaged meat that has been processed in Australia.

This would improve animal welfare standards while working to ensure that Australia's exports are affected as little as possible by replacing live cattle exports with pre-packaged meat exports.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As an alternative to the Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership which aims to improve abattoir practices in Indonesia and other countries, Australia should look at options to form partnerships to develop infrastructure in Australia's live export countries that would enable those countries to receive more pre-packaged meat from Australia.